



Political trends and leadership patterns in the abagusii community during the decolonization period from 1940-1963 in Kenya

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Abstract

The history of the Abagusii has not been adequately examined by the previous scholars since most of the scholars who have ventured into this subject have done it at wider levels of global, continental, regional and/or national while ignoring local level studies of specific African communities such as the Abagusii. Local level studies are critical as they unearth some of the political patterns of behaviour from individual communities towards effective participation in the national politics of independent Kenya. The study aimed at assessing Political Trends and Leadership Patterns in the Abagusii Community during the Decolonization Period from 1940-1963 in Kenya. Descriptive research design enabled data collection from both primary and secondary sources. This study was conducted in the larger Gusiiland in Kenya. Primary data was collected through oral interviews, questionnaires and archival sources while secondary data was obtained from libraries by consulting relevant text books, previous reports and political journals, Newspapers, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, dissertations, conferences and seminar papers and periodicals. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The results of the study indicated that the Abagusii community joined other Kenyans in the nationalist struggle by their leaders to form a united front through KAU and their own local political associations like the KU and the KHAA. Reforms introduced in Gusiiland included expansion of education opportunities, the field of land reform and agricultural improvement.

Keywords: agricultural improvement, Abagusii, nationalist, magazines

Introduction

In this paper, the general political atmosphere in Africa and Kenya during and after WWII is highlighted. The participation of the Abagusii in the wider spectrum of Kenya's anti-colonial struggle is discussed. Their involvement in the formation of political organizations and associations geared towards breaking the yoke of colonialism is examined and the role of key leaders behind these activities examined. The various changes and reforms initiated by the colonial government due to African pressure or European initiative during the period of nationalism and how they affected the Abagusii are surveyed. The theory of articulation of modes of production was to guide the research and to explain and interpret the data.

Research Context

The history of the Abagusii has not been adequately examined by the previous scholars since most of the scholars who have ventured into this subject have done it at wider levels of global, continental, regional and/or national while ignoring local level studies of specific African communities such as the Abagusii. Local level studies are critical as they unearth some of the political patterns of behaviour from individual communities towards effective participation in the national politics of independent Kenya. This has informed the need for this study on the political history of the Abagusii of South-Western Kenya. This study

reconstructs and documents the political history of Abagusii from 1940 to 1963. Politics definitely plays a critical role as it drives a society towards progress or plunge it into a state of stagnation or recession. Politics generally influences economic opportunities and access to vital social resources like education and healthcare, while creating sound laws and policies that govern the allocation and distribution of goods and resources among the population. Society thus needs to be equipped with education on politics or political literacy by giving focus to the subject of political history.

Literature Review

The subject of political history has attracted diverse interests from different scholars and with varying focus. Although the Abagusii political history is a relatively unexplored area, a number of scholars have engaged with it tangentially. One of the foundational studies among the Abagusii is the work of LeVine (1956) [11]. In his study, he identifies wealth among the Abagusii as a powerful tool in the quest for political power and social prestige. The Abagusii culture as LeVine argues emphasizes on ancestral worship, authoritarianism, interpersonal hostility, clannishness and very high acquisitive values. He sees the Abagusii as people who resort to court tribunals for the resolution of minor conflicts and the use of "powerful individuals" and "men of influence" as instruments of social control (p.77). However, being an anthropological researcher, LeVine's focus is not

on the community's political history. Important to the present study concerns the notion of powerful or influential individuals in the community. These are identified in this study as prime movers, and their contribution is documented.

In addition to key individuals, the political history of Abagusii overlaps with Kenyan nationalist movements. Highlighting the Abagusii contribution to Kenyan nationalism, Maxon (1961) observes that they were not mere passive receptors of the innovations of colonial officials but responded to the British initiatives thus influencing the course of the colonial history. They desired to exercise even greater and indeed complete control over both the governmental and non-governmental institutions developed during the colonial period. Maxon, notes that though the Abagusii were not involved in nationalist politics until later than some of other large ethnic groups in Kenya, the wish of many of them to shape their own destiny led them to join with others in throwing off the bonds of colonialism (1961). He asserts that their kind of resistance and other types of reaction to British initiatives formed a vital element in bringing about the many far-reaching changes of the colonial period. The shape such efforts took in Gusiiland is arguably unique, if not peculiar. Through pressure of different kinds and forms, the British were compelled to move faster or in different directions than they had planned. This study therefore thematizes such patterns in the community. Over the period of British rule (1907-1963), many great magnitude changes altered radically the traditional Abagusii political, military, judicial, economic, and educational systems as a new form of government and administration was introduced. The community thus became part of a larger political unit, the East Africa protectorate, later the colony or Kenyan protectorate. To a community having no centralized political institution, British rule brought a totally new system of centralized administration made up of chiefs and headmen. Importantly, Maxon identifies the Kisii Union (KU) as the earliest Abagusii political association formed in 1945 to represent an attempt by an emergent Abagusii petite bourgeoisie to obtain better access to local resources and economic opportunities (1961). While examining the changes brought about by colonialism among the Abagusii in this study, Maxon's findings are of relevance. The role of KU since then and other associations formed after independence as well as their place in the community's political trajectory are examined. These included the Kisii Highlands Abagusii Association (KHAA) in pre-independence, the Kenya Social Congress (KSC) and FORD-People political parties formed after independence.

In addition to prime movers and role of the community in the country's nationalist politics, scholars have engaged with other aspects that constitute political history. While tackling a general history of Abagusii, for example, Ochieng' (1971) touches on certain aspects relating to politics. Ochieng's work provides a framework for an understanding of the community's social, economic and political life in general. The Abagusii political evolution, according to him occurred once they settled in the Kano plains between A.D 1640-1755. He further alludes that they lived in scattered family units led by family heads and leadership was based on agnatic kinship (1971) before expanding and transforming the individual family units into small but distinct clans in which they migrated into their

present homeland. This study is important as it outlines the earliest political organizations such as corporate clans regarded distinct from other clans or corporate groups, as well as subsequent evolution into sub-tribes led by councils of clan elders. All these provide an apt beginning point to an assessment of the community's political history.

With the coming of christian missionaries to Gusiiland, changes in the community's social life which Ochieng' describes as inevitable took place. Bogonko (1977) examines the impact of Christianity on Abagusii education, health and general living styles. Although he focuses on the development of education in the community as opposed to its political history, his study is relevant as politics often overlap with education and other dimensions of life. Besides Christianization, British colonizers also significantly restructured the community's agricultural practices. Omwoyo (1990) ^[20] concentrates on the transformation of Agriculture among the Abagusii during the colonial period. His study thus contributes to the community's economic rather than political history. However, like education, agriculture related-activities and organizations by and large constitute, impact or shape community's political history.

More specific to the core of the present study is the argument advanced by Hakansson (1987) ^[9] and echoed by Nyachae (2010) ^[17]. Although they share a common language and cultural heritage, the Abagusii have never acted as a single political unit (Hakansson, 1987) ^[9]. In spite of constituting one vast society, a common language, shared territory, common customs and traditions, belief in a common ancestor (Mogusii) and a common God (Engoro), the Abagusii did not at any time subscribe to one central authority (Nyachae, 2010) ^[17]. Instead, they were a collection of many political units based on exogamous patrilineal clans or clan groupings (Nyachae, 2010) ^[17]. There was no tribal authority which overruled clan authorities hence a system describable as a chief-less society (Ominde, 1963) ^[21]. This is why Hakansson views the Abagusii as being organized into a maximally expanding lineage that fragmented into semi-autonomous family units (clans) which held claims to land succession, rituals and compensation (1987). The exogamous patrilineal clan (eamate) was thus the largest co-operative unit upon which political power and authority was based. This issue of a fragmented society of common ancestry forms the backbone of the present analysis. The study therefore interrogates whether the scenario persists or has changed and why.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the theory of articulation of modes of production, which finds its roots from the words of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). The modes of production theory were born out of the marriage of structural Marxism and political economy, through the interpretation and use of mode of production and social formation concepts (Ortner, 1984) ^[22]. It can be linked to Marx's materialist conception of History which is a methodological approach to the study of human societies and their development over time. The theory principally postulates that the material conditions of a society's mode of production, that is, the union of its productive capacity and social relations of production fundamentally determine its organization and development. The theory looks into the means by which humans collectively produce the necessities of life as the causes of developments and changes in human

society, politics included.

According to the theory, social classes and relationships between them, along with political structures and ways of thinking in society are founded on and reflect contemporary economic activity (Meillassoux, 1974)^[15]. This theory was found suitable in understanding the original material foundations of the Abagusii society and the influence this had in building political structures relative to the changes that occurred from the pre-colonial period, through colonial to the post-independence phases. Early in their history, the Abagusii interacted with the environment for survival and this exposed them to a myriad of challenges that caused their constant migration. The Abagusii modes of production during the pre-colonial period entailed survival on economic activities like hunting and gathering, livestock keeping and cultivation in a communal setting. These were curtailed by challenges such as internal and external feuds, drought, and diseases which prompted them to evolve conscious decisions about their relationships and political structures. These could influence their survival and existence since the theory springs from a fundamental underlying reality of human existence: that in order for human beings to survive and continue existence from generation to generation, it is necessary for them to produce and reproduce the material requirements of life. Marx went further to assert that in order to carry out production and exchange, people have to enter into very definite social relations, most fundamentally, "production relations".

Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to collect mainly qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources. It was used to explore why and how event happened or occurred over a period of time. This survey study was conducted in the larger Gusiiland that comprises of two Counties; Kisii and Nyamira created under the constitutional dispensation of 2010. In the 2009 population census, Kisii County had 1,152,282 people, while Nyamira County had 598,252 people giving a total sum for the two counties to be 1,750,534 (KNBS, 2010). A study population of 52 respondents was sampled to provide information on Abagusii political history using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The first respondents were purposively selected based on the advice and direction from the area chiefs. The first respondents then assisted in the identification of the next respondents using the snowball sampling technique until such a time that they begun to repeat the same information one after another, thus attaining a saturation point at 52. The identification of the initial set or group of individuals was facilitated by chiefs and/or assistant chiefs as well as village elders of the various locations and sub-locations in the different constituencies who were visited and contacted for assistance. The knowledgeable informants identified could either be male or female for objectivity purposes.

Primary sources constituted archival materials and information obtained through oral interview. Archival source documents included Political Record books, Provincial and District Annual Reports, Native affairs reports, Political Association reports, Colonial Government publications, Confidential reports, Diaries and Microfilms. The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) offices in Kisumu were also visited for records of political events related to the Abagusii. These gave first hand records from

participants and observers of various times. Oral interview was administered using a prepared interview schedule and questionnaire which facilitated first hand data collection from individual sampled respondents. Secondary data was collected from libraries by consulting relevant text books, previous reports and political journals, Newspapers, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, dissertations', conferences and seminar papers and periodicals obtained from institutions of higher learning

Tape recorded information from oral interviews was transcribed and analyzed for proper interpretation. The data was organized using Card notes to record data accessed through reading and from field notes during interviews. The data was then edited and 'cleaned up' to create categories and themes using codes by use of computer software. Use of codes entailed identifying distinct concepts and categories from the data during interviews to form the basic units for analysis. Highlights were used to distinguish concepts and categories, i.e to break down the data into master headings and sub-headings. The codes served both reference and factual functions in linking raw data (from field notes and interview transcripts) and answering the researcher's study questions. The analyzed data content was then arranged systematically into themes, and in a chronological order in respect to the major historical periods for the ease of interpretation. The data was then evaluated to determine its adequacy, credibility, usefulness, consistency and validation (or non-validation) in order to draw conclusions and recommendations.

Results and Discussion

The WWII and its Socio-Political Implications in Gusiiland

Like the WWI explored in the previous chapter, the WWII had far reaching implications on the Abagusii and thus constitutes a significant part of the community's political history. Undeniably one of the deadliest military conflicts in history, the WWII was sparked off by the territorial ambitions of the then German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, spreading from Europe into Africa and other areas. Though it began in 1939, for the Africans the war began in 1935 with Italy's invasion of Abyssinia (Boahen, 1987)^[3]. During this war, African soldiers commonly known as *askaris* were conscripted both by the British and Italians (1987). Basically, there were more Ethiopians, Somalis and Eritreans fighting for Italy during the East African Campaign than Italians.

At its core was Hitler's attempt to regain the German colonies lost after WWI (Dower, 1986)^[7]. Most notable of the colonies she lost were Alsace and Lorraine which got reverted back to France, while in Africa the Germans lost all their colonies including Namibia, Burundi, Cameroon, Rwanda, Tanzania and Togo. Dower notes that one of the benefits that came with being a colonial power was that of conscripting subjects to fight battles for them, and the British did this on a massive scale. African soldiers served overseas as far as Palestine, Ceylon, India and Burma (O. Mokenya, personal interview, 30th Nov, 2015). Africans made about 100,000 fighters in the Burma campaign alone and these were mainly battalions and divisions from the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) (Hodges, 1999). The Burma campaign was the longest land campaign fought by the British in WWII and Africans servicemen there came to be known as 'Burma Boys' (Mokenya, 30th

Nov, 2015). “Basically, Africans fought other Africans at the behest for the benefit of the feuding European colonialists” (<http://www.news.nationalgeographic.com> accessed on 17/06/2016, 2.10 P.M). Recruiting policies were much more sophisticated than had been in the WWI. Anti-Nazi and anti-Facist propaganda was broadcast on the radio and disseminated through newspapers and poster campaigns with dramatic cartoons and drawings depicting what life might be under German rule. On the whole, people rallied to the war effort angered by the invasion of Ethiopia. Enlistment to the armed forces was supposed to be voluntary but however, a good deal of pressure was also employed through local chiefs and forced labour was used in mining and agricultural areas (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>specials>p.20BBC> accessed On 14/03/2016 at 11.10 A.M). Apart from West Africa, the British also conscripted African soldiers from other parts of Africa for the East Africa Campaign against Italy, the German Motorised Company in the horn of Africa and against the French Vichy in the battle of Madagascar. These soldiers from East Africa were known as the King’s African Rifles (KAR), a regiment formed in 1902 (Jackson, 2005). Those who fought for Britain did so out of a sense of imperial patriotism and duty to the ‘motherland’ (E. Gisore, personal interview, 22nd Nov, 2015). A large number of ‘volunteers’ were forced to enlist into the British army by their tribal chiefs and British recruiters (Killingray, 2010). Other personal accounts given to demonstrate motivations that led people to war to offer military service among other things included adventure or a chance to see the world, earn money and/or prove manhood.

The outbreak of WWII just like the WWI caused panic among the Abagusii as many ran away into the bush to ‘hide’ while those outside the district began to stream back home in fear of being conscripted as carrier corps in the war (Kebasi, 28th Dec, 2014). The fear did not however last long as all returned to their jobs while others were recruited to the army by force and propaganda. In 1940, conscription for the East African Military Labour Supply (EAMLS) started followed by “assisted recruiting” for essential services in 1941. Young and energetic Abagusii men were taken and this put a strain on labour resources of the district as the workload and responsibilities on the Abagusii women who were now tasked to fend for the aged and children left behind increased. A total of 98,000 Kenyans participated in the war out of which Gordon (1946) ^[8] puts the final Abagusii contribution at about 10,000 *Askaris* and a slightly greater number of compulsory civil labourers (1946).

The impact of the WWII on Africans, Kenyans and Abagusii in particular generally heightened the political clamour for independence from colonial rule. Jeffreys (2005) ^[10] observes that the war saw the decline of the old European colonial powers which also became financially crippled by the conflict. The colonial ex-servicemen came back home dejected and became active participants in anti-colonial movements and nationalist politics. He adds that as the African soldiers fought overseas, they became exposed to new cultures and new ideas as their different regiments interacted and became a “melting pot” of different tribal allegiances within the colonially defined hierarchical structures (2005, p. 98). The wartime service acted as a unifying force which forged national identities as the close association with other soldiers made men to become more conscious of their cultural and social differences which the

Abagusii were reminded through oral tradition. (M. Monyancha, personal interview, 22nd Nov, 2015). The soldiers enlisted from and returning to the rural areas got involved in local rather than territorial conflicts (Jeffreys, 2005) ^[10].

African soldiers’ experience in the war was characterized by low levels of pay, food rations and poor conditions of service (M. Machani, personal interview, 19th Aug, 2015). The kind of treatment they received for the war service was poor compared to their white counterparts who took part in the same war. The roots of such inequities lay in the colonial perceptions of Africans and in the way racially discriminatory proscriptions pervaded the military. The scenario was replicated even among regiments from different parts of Africa, whereby West African soldiers reportedly received higher pay than their East African counterparts. This kind of disparity in appreciating Africans’ war effort was bound to accelerate anti-colonial sentiments after the war in East Africa generally, Kenya in particular and among the Abagusii. The notion of ‘white prestige’ was eroded by the cross-cultural contact. This became a major factor undermining colonial authority and turning African thoughts towards self-determination.

The Abagusii servicemen who fought in the WWII also went largely unrecognized in the post-war period. First, they were not adequately compensated for their war services whereas they played a pivotal role in the Allied forces victory, for instance by being given jobs. They became forgotten men of Africa colonial forces despite fighting for Britain with imperial patriotism on land, air and water. The situation is compounded further in modern times when these war veterans some of whom are dead and others surviving have been neglected both by the former colonial government and the current independent government. They came with nothing from the war and have been left to live in abject poverty with their families (Monyancha, 22nd Nov, 2015). Though the post-independence government tries to honour these men through memorable days like *mashujaa* (heroes) day and preserving their stories, the compensation accorded to them for the war service is widely considered inadequate. It has taken the British along time to acknowledge their war debt to Africa and the rest of the empire (An Al Jazeera TV Documentary, 14th June 2013, 8.30 PM).

One of the effects of the WWII is that the Abagusii lost their cattle by 1942 which were taken away at low prices in line with the wider colonial policy of producing enough food for the war effort. This disorganized the Abagusii who valued their animals as a source of livelihood (Monyancha, November 24th 2015). Consequently, the community was embittered thus cultivating a fertile ground for their resolve to agitate against colonial rule in union with other Kenyans. On the other hand, the war brought some money into Gusiiland by 1945 through family remittances, gratuities and profitable farming. Men who went to participate in the war were paid some money for their services and they sent home part of their earnings to assist their families. Further, the war contributed to production of more food among the Abagusii to provide for the war requirements and thus the farmers earned some extra income from the sale of this food (E. Gisore, personal interview, November, 22nd 2015). Gisore adds that the War exposed the Abagusii soldiers to many experiences including the great consciousness of the outside world which they later brought back home like the

inducement to appeal for educational opportunities. He argues that using these experiences, they were able to instigate, pressurize and petition the colonial government to introduce the necessary reforms like provision of more education opportunities and absorbing them into jobs after demobilization.

Further, when the war veterans returned home and settled into their villages, they shared their experiences with their people, especially about matters of nationalism thus eliciting the element of national pride besides community pride (Monyancha, 22nd Nov, 2015). This included joining and forming political organizations like the Kisii Union (KU) to work with others formed in other parts of the country in the quest for independence.

The Abagusii and Politics of Nationalism in Post-War Period

Politics of nationalism in Kenya had roots in the formation of the early political associations in different parts from 1920s which agitated the people's grievances against the colonial establishment.

According to Momanyi (1996) ^[16], the involvement of the Abagusii in Kenya's decolonization struggle was spearheaded by the role of WWII veterans and the Abagusii educated elite. Momanyi's observations echo those of respondents interviewed. For example, that both force and propaganda were used by the colonial government to lure the Abagusii to join the war. The WWII coincided with the emergence of a group of western educated elite in Kisii in mid 1940s. The demobilized soldiers and elite began exposing and undermining the colonial structure in a bid to help liberate their people from underprivileged positions in the colonial political economy. The contentious issue was that the veterans' efforts went largely unrewarded for their war services and they were instead forcefully demobilized and made to resettle in their former reserves (Monyancha, 22nd Nov, 2015). This helped to fuel opposition against the colonial establishment. Colonial education also became a key element used as a powerful weapon to voice people's dissatisfaction with the oppressiveness of the colonial government, which in policy terms underdeveloped and downgraded the Africans (Y Monisibari, personal interview, 30th Aug, 2015). Momanyi (1996) ^[16] avers by arguing that the colonial education stimulated anti-colonial African nationalism. The colonial schooling not only provided the literacy skills and linguistic qualifications but also acted as a unifying factor at the broader national level. Momanyi identifies other prime movers of Abagusii nationalism to include; the institutionalization of forced labour, the general wind of change across the continent in favour of independence and the natural desire for freedom (1996).

The Abagusii ethno-nationalism was put to test following the settlement of Kikuyus on their land in 1920s. This followed the colonial government's formal interpenetration laws which allowed Kenyan communities from overcrowded reserves to seek resettlement in less congested reserves belonging to other communities on condition of being ready to be assimilated. This attracted the Kikuyus who began arriving into the Gusi reserve or Gusiiland from early 1930s. One version of the story holds that the Abagusii chiefs like Musa Nyandusi quietly welcomed settlers from the more crowded reserves likely viewing them as an exploitable resource and a useful lever in local politics (O. Mounde, personal interview, 30th Aug, 2015). This explains

why the Kikuyu immigrant enclave was largely concentrated in his Nyaribari location around Keumbu. Reputed for his ruthlessness in dealing with local rivals, Nyandusi directed the settlers towards the land of less powerful clans (Mounde, 30th Aug, 2015).

In the other version, the Kikuyu on their part claimed that they actually purchased farms from powerful Abagusii figures as they never liked working for settlers. This was contrary to the Abagusii custom that made it impossible for individuals to acquire sole claim to land by purchase (N. Keburo, personal interview, 23rd Aug, 2015). The Kikuyu presence in Gusiiland degenerated into one of conflict pitting the two communities, the local administration and the central colonial government. Beginning 1930s, the colonial government decided to promote economic development in the reserves in order to expand African tax base and agricultural exports as a way of mitigating the serious budget gap occasioned by the global depression (Parsons, 2011) ^[23]. Several chiefs and politically connected individuals led by chief Nyandusi recognized the opportunities like being allowed to grow coffee on experimental basis with encouragement from the South Kavirondo DC, C.E.V Buxton. Chief Nyandusi, a small group of government employees and mission graduates pioneered in the commercialization of the highlands by investing in grain mills, producing for market and most importantly, claiming previously open land (Keburo, 23rd Aug, 2015). By 1938, it was reported that the Abagusii had occupied all their country up to their boundaries and that short-term labour shortages appeared in periods of rising crop production as young men ventured into commercial agriculture than paid employment. With these new developments, the foreign encroachment into Gusiiland became a source of considerable tension. While local elites profited from the land sales, the practice violated the local convention which held that land belonged to the clan rather than individuals. With the steady commercialization of agriculture in the reserves, the Kikuyu influx threatened to reach flood levels during WWII. The entrepreneurially focused Kikuyu had begun to threaten the prospects of the more marginal and less secure members of Abagusii society (Parsons, 2011) ^[23].

In response, local Abagusii men began to burn Kikuyu huts, drive cattle over their fields and pressed the colonial authorities to evict the Kikuyu trespassers in late 1930s. Exclusion minded DOs also ordered all Kikuyu 'infiltrators' who had arrived after 1940 to return to their own reserves, while those who had arrived in 1930s hired a lawyer in 1944 to petition the government to rescind the eviction notice for the about 4800 Kikuyus and recognize their legitimate claims to land in Gusi reserve. The educated and politically sophisticated members of the Kisii Union (KU) wrote a letter to the editor of the news-paper *Baraza* and rejected the Kikuyu penetrators' claims that they had settled with the permission of the Abagusii and charged that the Kikuyu had in fact refused adoption into the Abagusii 'tribe' and rejected the authority of Abagusii chiefs; claimed exemption from the government tribally sanctioned forced labour obligations, taxation and soil conservation rules. John Kebaso, the KU President thus demanded the eviction of the Kikuyus by declaring, "The soil is not enough and everybody must look for his own soil" (Parsons, 2011, p.42) ^[23]. Chiefs like Nyandusi also sought to push the government to expel the immigrants after the Abagusii had

quietly taken the Kikuyu money and profited from their labour. But the Kikuyu sought to continue staying in Gusiiland arguing that: they had been staying in the District for twelve years with permission from three of the seven chiefs and local administration; they had acquired their land through purchase from Abagusii elders; they held South Kavirondo District kipandes; they had built eight hundred huts, three shops and three schools, and also they had invoked the language of interpenetration. Depriving them of these rights would thus be against the rules of natural justice. The reality of the situation made the British officials to try to spread the Kikuyu infiltrators more evenly throughout the reserve in the hope of facilitating their absorption by the Abagusii (Maxon, 1986)^[14].

In face of this kind of pressure for eviction, some of the Kikuyu migrants aligned themselves with Jomo Kenyatta's brand of confrontational politics by emphatically and militantly asserting their Kikuyuness and seeking to justify and defend their continued stay in Gusiiland through powerful advocates like Leonard Beecher, the former representative for African interests on the LEGCO and Eliud Mathu, the then only African in LEGCO. Governor Mitchell also sympathized with the cause of this pioneer group of about five thousand (Parsons, 2011)^[23]. Njoroge Kagunda, one of the original immigrants and a self-avowed member of the banned Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) emerged as their spokesman in 1940s (2011). Though he claimed that his group followed the Abagusii customs, he called for Kikuyu seats in the South Kavirondo Local Native Council (SKLNC) and that the tribal courts ensure they knew how to handle Kikuyu issues. They wanted reopening of their schools and defiantly refused chief Nyandusi's call to marry their daughters to Abagusii men as a way of assimilating outsiders (B. Omambia, personal interview, 11th Aug, 2015). In 1947, Kagunda began a campaign to get the Kikuyu enclave to reject the authority of the Abagusii chiefs and District administration by burning their kipandes, reject communal labour obligations and boycotting DC's public meetings or *Barazas* (Omambia, 11th Aug, 2015). His activities made the colonial intelligence reports to list him as a "most evil and dangerous force in Gusiiland and one salaried of the Kisii/Nakuru branch of Kikuyu Central Association (KCA)" (2011, p.41). Consequently, colonial authorities responded by prosecuting him and his followers for being members of a banned organization and holding meetings without permission. The activities of these Kikuyu immigrants were significant in Abagusii political history since they taught the community how the Kikuyus defended their ethno-nationalism and as well exposed the wider picture of anti-colonial struggle in Kenya through these immigrant links with KCA and friction with local colonial authorities in Gusiiland.

In a September 1948 baraza, the authorities told the Kikuyu immigrants to accept adoption into Abagusii as per the interpenetration regulations. Kagunda obliged to this and the KCA members who volunteered were arrested on the spot while those who resisted were imprisoned for two months or fined (Parsons, 2011)^[23]. The central government that was protecting the insubordinate Kikuyu overturned the convictions and ordered retrial through the supreme court, demanding they be repaid the roughly Ksh 1000 they purportedly paid the Abagusii elite for land purchase if they were expelled, thus complicating the legal case as there was no formal right to sell communal tribe land (2011).

Nevertheless, Kagunda's group was squeezed by physical attacks from the angry Abagusii neighbours and the openly hostile DOs into eviction. For example, John Kebaso and other members of KU pressed the government with petitions calling for expulsion of the Kikuyu from their 'motherland' and in mid-1949, Kagunda and his followers were convicted of failing to assimilate into Abagusii society under the interpenetration regulations. The British resident magistrate ordered them out of the district, directing the then district authorities to destroy their huts, sell off their crops and deport them. This was however, politically embarrassing to the Kenyan government as Mathu continued to protest in LEGCO (2011). Under such pressure however, DOs estimated that most of the 500 Kikuyu families were now willing to give up their demands for specifically Kikuyu institutions and accept the authority of the Abagusii chiefs. This time, Nyandusi certainly succeeded to acquire a number of Kikuyu wives (keburo, 23rd Aug, 2015). In 1947, a delegation of Kikuyu elders from Gusiiland visited chief Musa to disassociate themselves from the KCA faction in order to survive the piling pressure on them and they were given a brief reprieve but under careful watch. When Kikuyu Senior Chief Mbiyu Koinange visited South Kavirondo District (SKD) a year later, he openly clashed with Kagunda over whether the Kikuyu immigrants were 'naturalized' Abagusii or not (Parsons, 2011)^[23]. The Abagusii-Kikuyu antagonism served to galvanize the community against perceived external enemy and out of the situation, political leaders like John Kebaso emerged. Equally important, the conflict triggered tension between the central and district governments in Kenya's history as each level sought to outdo each other, a situation that was brought to the floor of the LEGCO.

The events associated with Mau Mau, the declaration of state of emergency in 1953, as well as the persecution meted by Abagusii compelled the Kikuyu infiltrators to eventually accept to become adopted as per the interpenetration regulations. The Kikuyu community in Gusiiland soon backed down and adopted a more accommodating attitude by petitioning the colonial authorities to allow them take the same anti-Mau Mau oath sworn by the Abagusii (Mikaye, 26th Nov, 2015). The colonial authorities had however reached a point of no return as they set the Mau Mau dragnet in which security forces arrested and detained all the adult Kikuyu men in South Nyanza on grounds that they were security risks and had "breached the hospitality" of the Abagusii (2011, p.53). Three months later, the administration and security forces unleashed operation Ball and Chain which sent over two thousand Kikuyu women and children back to Kikuyu reserves, thus ending their over twenty years stay in Gusiiland (Mounde, 30th Aug, 2015). Generally, members of the Abagusii community supported the government's operation Ball and Chain mounted against the Kikuyu immigrants. In some instances they even assisted colonial officials to round up the Kikuyus (Keburo, 23rd, Aug, 2015). While it can be argued that the community was not against freedom fighting spirit, it however capitalized on the opportunity to score good riddance against the Kikuyu infiltrators.

Maxon (1986)^[14] has written about the Kisii Union (KU), formed in 1945 and operating until 1949. He identifies it as the first local Abagusii political association formed at the conclusion of WWII and which represented an attempt by an emergent Gusiii petite bourgeoisie to obtain better access

to local resources and economic opportunities. These founders sought to achieve this through exercising of greater influence in local affairs, notably in such institutions as the Local Native Council (LNC), District Education Board (DEB) and local Administration. Members of this association included successful and wealthy peasant farmers, traders, employees of Christian missions or the colonial administration, most of whom had attained some degree of education, and they represented a competing group of petite bourgeoisie and administration chiefs (1986). Maxon describes the founders of this union as men who had responded to employment and education opportunities arising under colonial rule but found the local administration unable and unwilling to cater for their interests and needs. They thus usually became rivals of the established chiefs and headmen. The success of the union leaders in obtaining greater political and economic role depended on the ability and willingness of the colonial state to accommodate them and this provides the clearest reason for its relatively short duration as a political body. The association together with others like the Young Kavirondo association (YKA) and the East African Association (EAA) that existed since 1920s was reformist in nature, seeking to work within the colonial system rather than overthrow it (Bogonko, 1980)^[4].

The KU propelled Kebaso into a national platform. Of all politicians from Gusiiland, he was identified as a key political figure in Abagusii politics of national ranking in the period before and during independence (N. Mainda, personal interview, 26th Nov. 2015). Not only was he one of the founding members of the KU, but also the editor of the union's local publication, *Sauti Ya Bomani* (Voice of the homestead) in the then South Nyanza District. Earlier, Kebaso had been one of the founder and interim committee members of KAU formed on 10th October 1944, becoming the first president of the Union's Nairobi branch (Maxon, 1961). As the editor of the publication, Kebaso was instrumental in highlighting community issues and invoking the conscience of the community politically and by extension the issues which were in line with KAU manifesto of addressing general Kenyan African problems under colonial rule. KAU changed name to KASU only after two weeks upon the insistence of the colonial Governor who argued that since its main purpose was to help Eliud Mathu as the first African representative in LEGCO, then it should be involved in 'studying' African problems (Maxon, 1961). Besides leading KU and representing community interests in KAU, Kebaso helped in the formation of other political organizations. Following the lifting of the ban on district political organizations by the Government as per the 1955 Oliver Lyttleton's constitutional reforms, he took part in the formation of the Kisii Highlands Abagusii Association (KHAA) (Maxon, 1961). This association assisted the community to articulate issues of concern to the colonial regime. The Abagusii Association was formed alongside others like the Kenya African National Congress (KANC) registered in Nairobi in April 1956 and led by C.M.G Argwings Kodhek (Maloba, 1989)^[13]. During the 1957 elections, KANC split and the Nairobi Peoples' Congress (NPC) was formed, with Tom Mboya as the president. Other District based political organizations formed then included Mombasa African Democratic Union (MADU), Taita African Democratic Union (TADU) and the Nakuru African Progressive Party (NAPP). It is only in Central Province

where the formation of such associations was not allowed because the main activities of Mau Mau were concentrated there (<http://statehousekenya.go.ke/hist1900.htm> accessed on 02/09/2012).

In the first African elections held in 1957, the Abagusii community was represented in the contest by John Kebaso through KHAA to represent South Nyanza. In his election manifesto, Kebaso bluntly stated that the Africans in Kenya were not ready for self-government. He however emerged second and was defeated by Lawrence Oguda to represent South Nyanza by garnering 8,200 votes against Oguda's 13,882. Elsewhere in the country, those elected to represent different regions were, Daniel Arap Moi to represent Rift Valley, Bernard Mate to represent Central, James Nzau Muimi to represent Ukambani, Tom Mboya to represent Nairobi, Oginga Odinga to represent Central Nyanza, Masinde Muliro to represent North Nyanza and Ronald Ngala to represent Coast (Crowley, 1967)^[6]. These first elected Africans formed an association called African Elected Members Organization (AEMO). Though the Abagusii representative was edged out in this Kenyan electoral contest of 1957, he nonetheless made a good show on the community's behalf in the national politics of the time. However later, Kebaso became Senator in independent Kenya's first bi-cameral parliament and he served as one of the two Deputy Speakers until bicameralism ended in 1966 (<http://statehousekenya.go.ke/histhtm> accessed on 02/09/2012)

There emerged skeptics during the field research who argued that the Abagusii were not prominently identified with Kenya's mainstream decolonization politics. The explanation given to this is that the impact of colonial presence in their territory was not enormous. For instance, they were not subjected to land alienation (Keburo, 23rd Aug, 2015 and corroborated with <http://www.sscnet.uncl.edu/anthro/faculty> accessed on 25/12/2013). It is further argued that the Abagusii had very negative attitude to education which was associated with the British colonial domination and hence this made them to have minimal participation in the national arena (Choti, 2009)^[5]. According to Choti, the little progress in education in Gusiiland in 1920s and 1930s led to very few of them serving as civil servants in post-independence Kenya. The Abagusii did not form part of the African representation to LEGCO which began with Eliud Mathu in 1944 and then rose to two in 1946, four in 1948 and six in 1952 (<http://enzimuseum.org> accessed on 27/12/2013).

After the WWII, some people who did not like the peaceful means used by KAU in the struggle for independence, especially some ex-African soldiers who fought on the British side in that war formed an organization known as *Aanake A fourty* (The fourty group). This movement later came to be known as Mau Mau which was formed in 1952 among the Kikuyu (Ochieng, 1977)^[19]. Though Mau Mau has been seen as a Kikuyu 'tribal' movement, Buijtenhuijs (1973) argues that it was not hostile to other ethnic groups in Kenya and rather it was a case of tribalism serving the nation (p.72). Another Kenyan historian, Maina Wa Kinyatti's argues that Mau Mau was not simply a Kikuyu Movement, and that Kikuyus were not the only freedom fighters in the forest, but rather there were other fighters recruited from among the Kamba, Maasai, Luo, and Meru (Ochieng', 1977)^[19]. The Mau Mau operatives also existed in Gusiiland in the form of Kikuyu infiltrators who had

entered there from early 1930s under the colonial government’s interpenetration regulations to ease congestion in the Kikuyu reserve. When the state of emergence was declared in 1953, the Kikuyu community in Gusiiland soon backed down and adopted a more accommodating attitude by petitioning the colonial authorities for permission to take the same anti-Mau Mau oath sworn by the Abagusii. It was however too late for the Kikuyu migrants to escape the Mau Mau dragnet through assimilation as the colonial government singled out the small pockets of Kikuyu who had penetrated to South Nyanza as a ‘menace’ (Parsons, 2011) [23]. In November 1953, security forces detained all the adult Kikuyu men it could find in South Nyanza on grounds that they were security risks and had “breached the hospitality” of the Abagusii. For the Abagusii well-connected leaders like chief Musa Nyandusi, the Mau Mau proved a boon as the colonial authorities set out to try to return the vacated Kikuyu lands to their rightful Abagusii ‘owners’. The Mau Mau movement has been credited by a Kenyan historian Dr B.E Kipkorir as being certainly responsible for the precise timing of the conclusion of British rule in Kenya (Ochieng, 1974) [19]. However, a few of those interviewed indicated that some Abagusii were arrested during the declaration of the state of emergence for being mistaken to be Kikuyus.

This research ascertained that the Abagusii representatives did not take part in the constitutional Lancaster House conferences of 1960 and 1963. However on party affiliation at independence, Bennet (1963), notes that the Abagusii belonged to the group of major tribes that KANU controlled. Others in this group were the Kikuyu, Luo, Embu, Meru and Kamba. KADU on the other hand had allegiance of pastoralist groups like the Maasai, Kalenjin, Ngala’s Giriama and other smaller tribes. The Luhya were split with some supporting Muliro in KADU. Bennet argues that after the 1963 independence elections, Kenyatta formed a KANU government and moved to forestall the fear or accusation that KANU was only a Kikuyu-Luo alliance by appointing ministers from other communities including a Kisii (Lawrence Sagini), a Kamba, a Maragoli and even a Maasai who was appointed a parliamentary secretary. In the system of constituencies created for self-government in 1963, the Abagusii with a population of 519,000 received six seats. This was an ethnic based electoral system often at odds with the concepts of majority rule and democratic governance as shown by five constituencies being created in the North-Eastern region where the population numbered just over 290,000 (KNBS, 1962). The Abagusii, at independence thus belonged to KANU party and all their elected representatives to parliament went on the party’s ticket (IEBC, 2003).

Developments in Education in Gusiiland after 1945

The colonial policy after the WWII was responsive to the increased demand for education among the Abagusii. The end of the war spurred the desire for western education to higher levels among the Abagusii. As far as education facilities were concerned, missionary control of schools was rectified. In the former missionary control system, the denominations which owned the schools barred children from other denominations from accessing education from their facilities (Amoka, 1999) [1]. After WWII, however, with the increased demand for western education, the LNC decided to build inter-denominational schools in Gusiiland.

This caused a rapid increase in the enrolment of learners in both primary and secondary education. The colonial government and native council schools offered a broad curriculum that also accommodated some aspects of African culture (Nyamwaka, 2011) [18].

The colonial government generally gave prominence to African education particularly in Gusiiland in the post-war period. This can be witnessed from the fact that in 1960, South Nyanza spent about 44% of the council’s revenue expenditure on education (KNA DC/KSI/5/3). Already established intermediate schools sponsored by missionaries included Nyanchwa and Gesusu (Nyaribari Location), Magena (Machoge Location), Motagara (North Mugirango Location) all SDA sponsored; Nyabururu (Kitutu Location) and Amasago (Nyaribari Location) sponsored by Roman Catholic Church; Itibo (Kitutu Location) sponsored by Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG); Itierio (Wanjare Location) sponsored by Swedish Lutheran Mission as well Kereri (Nyaribari Location) and Gionseri (Bassi Location) established by the District Education Board (DEB). This was in addition to the Kisii Government School established in 1934 by the colonial government in Kisii town to offer secondary education (KNA DC/KSI/5/3).

Table 4: Shows school attendance statistics for Abagusii children

| Type of school | Boys | Girls | Total |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| Aided Primary | 25,640 | 9,065 | 34,704 |
| Aided Intermediate | 6,209 | 727 | 6,936 |
| AIDED TOTAL | 31,849 | 9,792 | 41,641 |
| Unaided Primary | 3,627 | 1,803 | 5,351 |
| Unaided Intermediate | 577 | 309 | 886 |
| UNAIDED TOTAL | 4,204 | 2,112 | 6,237 |

Source: KNA DC/KSI/1/14 South Nyanza District Annual Report, 1947

The figures captured in the above table shows the importance attached to education by 1947. The popularity being gained by the western education can be attributed to the efforts by the colonial government officials through chiefs and with the help of mission churches who did this through propaganda, articles and *barazas* (Nyamwaka, 2011) [18].

The early beneficiaries from the western education managed to get early employment in the colonial administration system in low cadre jobs like teaching and clerical work in government offices. These were the elite group which later formed the clique of early politicians who spearheaded the early political associations from this part of the country since they were exposed to the colonial system (O. Abuya, personal interview, 24th Aug, 2015). The elite in Gusiiland began exposing and undermining the colonial structure in mid 1940s in a bid to help liberate their people from underprivileged positions in the colonial political economy (Momanyi, 1996) [16]. The education acquired seemed to be a powerful weapon that was used to voice people’s dissatisfaction with the oppressiveness of the colonial government which in policy terms underdeveloped and downgraded the Africans. The education thus stimulated anti-colonial African nationalism. Schooling during colonial times not only provided the literacy skills and linguistic qualifications but also acted as a unifying factor at the broader national level. For instance, John Kebaso who was among the early Abagusii beneficiaries from colonial education teamed up with other educated Kenyans like E.

Mathu, F.Khamisi, A. Awino, J. Gichuru, S. Mulandi, H. Ole Nangurai, S.O Josiah, F. Ng'ang'a, J. Jeremiah, J. Otiende and S. Jakeu and founded KAU (Crowley, 1967)^[6].

The Effect of the 1954 Swynnerton Plan on the Abagusii

Reforms in the field of land tenure and agriculture also affected the Abagusii economic lifestyles and thus by extension constituted their political history. The changes introduced in 1954 by R.I.M Swynnerton definitely touched the lives of Abagusii who interpreted them in their own style. The plan which Swynnerton drew created reforms which had political connotations. Swynnerton was a colonial Assistant Director of Agriculture (Lonsdale, 1964)^[12]. This plan altered the concept of communal ownership of land by recommending the abolition of traditional system of land tenure so that consolidation and registration of African land through acquisition of individual titles was possible, arguably for better management and as a way of promoting Agriculture by enabling individuals to secure loans for self improvement (1964). The plan also provided for increased extension services, processing and marketing services, as well as provision of some credit to African farmers (O. Okengo, personal interview, 18th July, 2015). It encouraged the increase of output of cash crops notably coffee, pyrethrum and tea among African farmers (Bennet, 1963)^[2]. The seeds were availed to thousands of farmers in 1950s and co-operatives were formed for their marketing. Consequently, tea was introduced in Gusiiland in 1957, and was first planted at Mokomoni and later at Magombo in East Kitutu location. Men now ventured to dominate in the management of cash crops and to control its income thus causing a shift in labour. All the colonial agricultural field officers were men who customarily targeted male members of the household. Men were the first to receive education on modern agricultural techniques and usually collected the cash derived from the sale of these cash crops which they mainly used for the payment of their children's school fees and other levies plus purchase of uniforms among other family commitments (Okiambe, November, 28th 2015).

A part from Tea and coffee, the Abagusii also took on to the growing of pyrethrum, passion fruit, and maize which turned out to be major export crops by 1950. The Kisii Coffee Growers Co-operative (KCGC) was started in 1947 and grew to become the Kisii Farmers Co-operative Union (KFCU) in 1950 with primary societies based on the various pulping stations. A lorry was also acquired and stores built to enable the union market members' coffee (Omwoyo, 1990)^[20].

The first coffee factory in Gusiiland was built at Mogonga in 1952. This factory was established at the site owing to an ecological experiment which proved the area suitable for the crop in terms of soils and weather conditions (N. Okiambe, personal interview, 28th Nov, 2015). By mid 1950s the bulk of the crop in South Nyanza district came from Gusii highlands with 26 out of 31 coffee societies being in found there (KNA/DC/KSI/1/22). In 1954, the Abagusii peasants took advantage of the removal of the maximum acreage limitations on coffee and the total production area rose from 2,165 acres grown by 5,663 farmers in 1956 (KNA DC/KSI/1/18) to 4,400 acres grown by about 19,000 farmers and earning them over 300,000 pounds in 1961 (KNA/KSI/1/23).

Generally, the agricultural developments associated with the Swynnerton plan had political implications. Firstly, since

they were initiated by the colonial regime, the far reaching reforms they brought were at first treated with suspicion and contempt by the Abagusii. Such were policies like the land consolidation, introduction coffee production and marketing whereby farmers began to elect representatives to the union to advance their interests (A. Ombuki personal interview, August 28th 2015). The elective positions such as for directors makes the ones elected to wield political influence. Similarly, coffee and tea agricultural sectors are of perennial campaign agenda in Abagusii politics with politicians capitalizing on them to promise radical reforms in every electioneering period but with little achievement realized.

Conclusions

In this paper, it has been established that the Abagusii community joined other Kenyans in the nationalist struggle. They did this by their leaders joining other Kenyan communities to form a united front through KAU and also forming their own local political associations like the KU and the KHAA. The major reforms introduced in Gusiiland during this period of colonial rule have also been captured in this chapter. These reforms mainly led to expansion of education opportunities as more Abagusii people enrolled in schools, the field of land reform and agricultural improvement. Education gained by the Abagusii helped to reawaken them in terms of political consciousness in dealing with the colonial regime. The Swynnerton plan of 1954 recommended for the abolition of traditional land tenure system in favour of land consolidation and registration of individual titles. Agricultural expansion was encouraged through provision of extension services, credit facilities and coffee co-operative societies were also started. These agricultural developments were at first treated with suspicion and contempt by the Abagusii since they were initiated by the colonial regime before being internalized. Consequently, when Kisii Farmers Co-operative Union (KFCU) was formed, elective politics were introduced into the community through the coffee sector as farmers chose representatives to the union to advance their interests in production and marketing.

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